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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 004774

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SUBJECT: SALAH AD DIN PROVINCE: THE ISSUES, THE LEADERS,
POSSIBLE STEPS AHEAD

Classified By: Classified by Robert Gilchrist, Political Counselor, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Salah ad Din, a Ba'athist stronghold under the previous regime, has had difficulty finding itself in a democratic Iraq. Most of the Sunni majority in the Province do not support the insurgency, but at the same time are frustrated by a provincial government in which they do not feel they have a substantial voice. Debaathification and dismantling of the former Iraqi Army (IA) caused high unemployment and left many without pensions. Industries are aging and operating at diminished capacity. Substantial debathification reform, new elections, and clarification of the role of provincial governments could contribute to improved stability and security. This is one of a series of analyses from Provincial Reconstruction Teams analyzing the governates of Iraq. End summary.

POLITICAL ISSUES

¶2. (C) Politically, SaD is at a crucial stage. As Iraq's Baathist stronghold under the previous regime, the heavily Sunni province has had difficulty finding itself in a democratic Iraq. Some former Baathists have embraced democracy and are supportive of the Coalition Forces (CF); others are actively subverting the political process and participate in the insurgency. The vast majority of the province's residents, however, are somewhere in between. They do not feel as though the provincial government acts in their best interest, as it is perceived to be dominated by self-interested leaders. They are equally not convinced that the pro-Baathist insurgents have a better solution. They see the central government as Shia-controlled and biased against Sunnis, especially those of Salah ad Din. They argue for reformation of debaathification regulations, a greater Sunni voice in the national political process, a united Iraq with resource sharing, provincial and national elections, and inclusion of SaD residents in the military. In addition, while not vocal about a guilty verdict, SaD residents are against the execution of Saddam.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

¶3. (C) Economically, Salah ad Din is depressed. Debaathification and dismantling of the former Iraqi Army (IA) has caused high unemployment, left many without pensions, and denied the province its traditional principal employer: the military. The province's industrial factories, including the Bayji oil refinery, are aging and unable to

operate at full capacity. Agriculture has great potential, but limited access to inputs and a disposition against farming prevent growth in the industry. The lack of functional banks, access to loans/capital, and efficient transportation links prevents development in the private sector. It is clear that some anti-Iraq forces (AIF) support is economically based. Corruption slows economic progress and reduces the effectiveness of development and infrastructure improvement projects.

¶4. (S) Targeted fear tactics by pro-Baathist insurgents and AQIZ-affiliates, sectarian violence, and other criminal activity are creating a security environment in Salah ad Din where democracy and a free market economy cannot flourish. Provincial Council members are too scared to travel to meetings, restaurants and other businesses are being bombed, and assassinations and kidnappings of provincial government officials routinely occur. Though largely a homogenous Sunni population, sectarian tension came to the forefront in mid-October with violence around the Shia enclaves of Balad and ad Dujeel. Concern remains that the sectarian violence in Baghdad and Diyala province and tensions related to the reconstruction of the Golden Dome Mosque in Samarra may cause additional flares up.

KEY POLITICAL FIGURES

¶5. (C) Social upheaval and limited integration into the political process have resulted in a void of political leaders in the province.

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¶6. (C) The elected provincial government officials, including the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Provincial Council, are not representative of or respected in Salah ad Din. They are seen as largely ineffective and highly corrupt. That said, they (especially the Deputy Governor) wield significant influence over the day-to-day operations of the provincial government, and residents seek their influence to resolve issues or to obtain access to government contracts. Additionally, many of the Sunnis at the national-level are perceived as outsiders who do not understand the provinces or the intricacies of Saddam's regime (and its implications in the current democratic political process).

¶7. (C) The Baath Party, though fractured by the spectrum of supporters described in question 1, remains very popular. Few in the province are ready to see it go, and most argue for its inclusion in the political process. Of the parties participating in the political process, the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) is the best established and most supported. Most political parties are inactive, and their leaders claim they will remain dormant until the elections.

¶8. (C) Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and ousted (for corruption) Parliamentarian Mishaan al Jabouri are often listed among the province's favored national politicians. If a strong autocratic Sunni figure emerged on the national political scene, he would likely garner significant support in Salah ad Din.

COMMENT: POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

¶9. (C) The province's cocktail of economic decline and thwarted political ambition is hampering stability. Improving security and reducing violence in the province hang on two issues: political participation and unemployment.

¶10. (C) To bring the Sunnis of Salah ad Din into the political fold, debaathification must be revisited. While

debaathification excludes some potential leaders from government service, the current debaathification restrictions have become a symbol to SaD Sunnis of what they perceive to be a Shia-dominated government's rejection of their participation in the political process. In addition to reforming the debaathification regulations, establishing a "Sunni broker" in Baghdad to help the SaD provincial government liaise with the GOI and assisting high-level GOI leaders visit SaD would increase SaD resident's feeling that they have a voice in the national political decision-making process.

¶11. (C) To reduce unemployment, debaathification exceptions should be processed more expeditiously (with restoration of pensions), support should be given to vocational/technical schools, and the agricultural and industrious sectors must be expanded. Additionally, while politically tenuous, many contacts have suggested re-incorporation of former Iraqi Army military professionals in the new IA.

¶12. (C) Additional sectarian violence in the ethnically mixed areas of Balad and ad Dujeel could be avoided through strengthening the local ISF presence, ensuring militias with sectarian allegiances do not take hold, and encouraging local tribal leaders to condemn sectarian violence and militias.

¶13. (C) Democratic political structures are nascent in SaD. Democratic principals and processes, with safeguards and checks and balances in the system, have not been fully embraced, resulting in the legislative branch's assumption of many executive branch powers, such as contracting and project execution. While active, the executive branch does not have a clear role or a defined mandate. As the national constitution does little to clarify the duties and responsibilities of each branch and of elected officials, it is largely left to the officials themselves to define their offices. This tips power into the hand of the more ruthless players who are able to assemble power by intimidation, and reinforces tribal and religious power bases of elected officials. The Directorates General (DGs) of the ministries are functioning, but decentralization has caused confusion, mismanagement, and inefficiency. Many of the DGs are also demoralized by the confusion within the provincial government that results in misuse or non-use of their experience and training. Corruption is also diminishing the establishment

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of effective democratic institutions in the provincial government.

¶14. (SBU) The PRT's engagements are doing much to define the independent roles of each branch of the provincial government, to increase transparency and accountability by systematizing contracting and budgeting procedures, and to help make elected leaders answerable to their constituents. However, legislation clarifying provincial powers and new provincial elections are necessary to restore the provincial government's legitimacy and to give it the necessary authority to full its responsibilities.

¶15. (C) Reconciliation, for SaD Sunnis, means playing a greater role in the national decision-making process. Practically speaking, that would look like action on the national reconciliation plan, revision of the debaathification regulations, equitable resource sharing, and assurances that a "federalized Iraq" does not mean three separate political entities.

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